

C. Training and Support for Project Participants

OCS encourages AFI Projects to include training sessions and other support services to facilitate the savings and asset-purchase process for participants. Your organization can be creative in delivering services directed toward the needs of your target population.

Training varies among current AFI Projects. Some provide these services in-house or through partners. Some use only external training sources. Many grantees raise the quality of their training by using existing programs or bringing in experts at critical times.

“The [financial] education is ultimately what they take with them.”
—A representative of a statewide AFI Project Network

Training sessions may be in class, online, or through self-guided materials. Topics, too, vary widely. Most training programs are designed to encourage active participation, using adult learning techniques and culturally relevant exercises to further engage the attendees.

Tip: Some Training Thoughts

Here are some thoughts when designing your AFI Project training:

- Use training to help determine if enrollees are ready to open an IDA or whether it would be better to wait until their financial situation improves.
- Take ample time to train. Clients need to practice what they learn.
- Build a relationship with clients. Trust and communication can help them stay engaged and meet their goals.
- Consider whether you want to require clients to complete training before opening up a savings account. However, some AFI Projects feel the need to get the IDA account going right away to keep clients engaged in training.
- Training alone might not be enough for some participants. Clients often need a lot of preparation and one-on-one case management. However, some participants need less training.

Financial and Asset-Specific Training

Financial and asset-specific training varies among AFI Projects.

- Financial education workshops cover basic money management skills and information like teaching clients how to negotiate with a bank to get services (and even low or no fees) to better meet their needs.
- Asset-specific training programs provide information and tools that help facilitate a successful purchase. Such training can also help clients after they have obtained their asset, like home buyer training that provides insight on how to maintain the home and make timely mortgage payments.
- Usually, financial education occurs earlier—right before or after enrolling in the program or opening an IDA. Asset training occurs a bit later or much later in the program, depending on readiness and training needs.

TIP: Nonprofit organizations have access to diverse, comprehensive, and free financial training curricula. A comprehensive list of these resources is in Appendix A.

Many current projects coordinate with partner organizations that specialize in financial education. They arrange for the partners to provide the training. Examples include bringing in a housing specialist or mortgage lender for training on home ownership or a financial aid professional to talk about education financing. One AFI Project works “closely with job developers in two programs because they have a better idea of what’s going on in the industry and what courses to take, where, and [how to] negotiate deals on training.”

But make sure you are using the right outside trainers and keep your IDA staff involved. Why? Because some financial services experts may not be skilled in adult education. Don’t underestimate the skills needed here because client success is tied closely to the quality of the economic literacy training you provide.

Case Management

In addition to the trainings, most AFI Projects also provide one-on-one counseling and case management services. In fact, some AFI grantees find that training is just the beginning of the longer term support the project provides for IDA participants—be it learning how to save to maintaining a home or small business over time. These additional services can help participants who are grappling with family, job, or social service challenges, and are also designed to help participants reach the financial milestones critical to an AFI Project.

When case management is needed, it can be critical to the success of clients who lack the skills to make an IDA work without ongoing support. Here are a few examples of how some current AFI Projects provide case management services:

- One agency offers ongoing economic skills training, sends out statements to clients, convenes quarterly savers clubs, provides consumer credit counseling, and makes referrals regarding more in-depth needs.
- At another agency, the trainer does case management–type work when she goes through a stack of statements. If she sees a participant didn’t make a deposit, she’ll write a letter or make a call to say, “What’s going on here?” According to an official of that agency, “We have a 90 percent retention rate... because she spends so much time.”
- At a third agency, formal case management means making at least a monthly contact to help clients keep on track. Are they depositing consistently? What challenges are being faced? How can they be handled?

Some AFI Projects, however, advocate targeting participation by those who are truly ready and able to succeed with an IDA without requiring intensive case management.